

28 Jefferson County Leader

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Thursday, March 28, 2002

# Doe Run agrees to buy houses; 26 now and 160 over 2 years

By Peggy Scott  
For the Leader

The Doe Run Co., operators of the nation's largest lead smelter in Herculaneum, have agreed to a voluntary buyout of homes within about 3/8 mile of the plant, to be completed within two years.

The agreement was announced following a six-hour March 21 meeting between Doe Run, the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the state Department of Natural Resources and Gov. Bob Holden.

The company agreed to immediately purchase homes within 3/8 mile of the smelter where children age 6 or younger live.

The boundaries of the designated buyout area include the slag pile to the south, the Doe Run smelter property to the east, Joachim Creek to the west. To the north, the boundary starts at the Joachim Creek bridge on Joachim Avenue and continues on Joachim Avenue to Mott Street.

The line runs just behind the Herculaneum High School track to meet with Broadway Street and then continues to the Mississippi River. Dunkin School District property is not included in the buyout area.

Over the next two years, Doe Run has agreed to buy all the homes within the specified area, about 160 residences.

Doe Run Co. spokesman Barb Shepard said the company has also said it will buy other properties outside that area, on a case-by-case basis.

"We wanted to leave it open,"

lease. "All the parties involved demonstrated their commitment to making significant progress in resolving this critical health issue."

The agreement doesn't stop or change the lead contamination cleanup already under way in Herculaneum.

Doe Run has been under orders from the EPA and DNR to clean up lead contamination in the air, soil and water around Herculaneum.

The timeline for the cleanup has been accelerated after federal and state regulators determined that the pollution problems were worse than originally expected.

A buyout of homes wasn't part of the original cleanup order, agreed to by the regulatory agencies and Doe Run in 2001. Shepard emphasized that the proposed buyout agreed to last week is offered to homeowners, but no one is required to sell their property. The details for selling homes to the company haven't been announced.

"We're looking at fair market value," Shepard said. "We will have to define fair market. We will have outside appraisers make that determination."

Shepard said 26 families have been targeted for the first round of buyouts; they were identified by the health department. The children under age 6 weren't required to have elevated blood lead levels to be considered for the buyout.

In a company news release, Jeffrey Zelms, president and CEO of the Doe Run Co., said, "Although the science regarding exposure to lead does not allow precise answers to many questions, the Doe Run Co. believes that the acquisition of property surrounding the

within 3/4 mile from the smelter had elevated levels; 20 percent living within one mile of the smelter had elevated levels, and 23 percent living within 1 1/4 miles from the smelter had elevated levels.

Earlier the state health department had announced that 45 percent of Herculaneum children tested for lead in 2001 had elevated levels. The announcement helped prompt action on the state level.

Jerry Martin, a Herculaneum resident and former city mayor, is helping orga-

nize a group called Herculaneum First.

"There is a group of citizens who didn't want to be bought out in Herculaneum and who didn't want the city to be placed on the Superfund NPL list," Martin said. "We were not really happy with what's going on."

However, he was pleased with the voluntary buyout agreement.

"I think the agreement is good for the people who want the buyout and good for the city," Martin said. "I look forward to the new challenge. This is all we wanted from the start."

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Doe Run Co. spokesman Barb Shepard said the company has also said it will buy other properties outside that area, on a case-by-case basis.

"We wanted to leave it open," Shepard said. "There may be some unique situation that needs to be considered. Our focus is in the area we've announced."

Shepard said a community meeting is being planned. "At that meeting, we will discuss what the program is and what the process is," she said.

Holden, who called the meeting with Doe Run, said he was pleased with the agreement.

"This agreement will result in immediate action to protect the children at a mile of the smelter had elevated blood lead levels, 35 percent of children living

required to have elevated blood lead levels to be considered for the buyout.

In a company news release, Jeffrey Zelins, president and CEO of the Doe Run Co., said, "Although the science regarding exposure to lead does not allow precise answers to many questions, The Doe Run Co. believes that the acquisition of property surrounding the smelter in Herculaneum will alleviate many concerns of people in the community and the company is willing to step up and help in this situation."

At a Community Advisory Group meeting March 19, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services said 2001 blood lead tests of children under age 6 showed that 56 percent of children tested who live within 1/4 mile of the smelter had elevated blood lead levels.

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Thursday, March 28, 2002

LETTERS

Jefferson County Leader 11

# Press, politicians aren't telling the whole story in Herculaneum

To the editor:

To the parents and the students of the Jefferson R-7 School District, this is concerning Herculaneum and The Doe Run Company. Please don't believe everything you have read and heard about the situation in our town.

The news media, our elected officials, government agencies and small groups of residents have blown the whole situation way out of proportion. The facts being reported are one-sided. Each of these groups has its own agenda. The news media needs a story, elected officials are hoping for political gain, the government agencies are trying to cover their own blunders and the residents, well, their motive is obvious if you really listen to what they are saying.

Before you rule out Herculaneum High School as an option, I urge you to talk with our administrators, teachers, or even high school secretaries. Let them tell you what the newspapers are not telling. Our school buildings are NOT "contaminated". Your child will not become a bumbling idiot by playing football on our field or running on our streets.

Herculaneum High School continues to graduate some of the top scholars and athletes in Jefferson County. In the 2000 and 2001 graduating classes, we have had a student ranked in the top 100 in the state. In 1999, we have a student nominated for the Wendy's Heisman Trophy, which is based on athletics and academics. According to a recent survey by the Post-Dispatch, Herculaneum was ranked eighth in the St. Louis Metro area for their ACT scores. The only other school listed was Festus.

In the past three years, we can boast a state championship baseball team (1999) two state champions in track (2001) and a state champion cross country team (2001). Not to mention conference and district championships in baseball, basketball and football. We also have several students who have earned All-Conference, All-District, All-Metro and All-State honors. In 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 a Herculaneum athlete has been named Small School Conference Most Valuable Player in baseball. The list goes on and on.

Our current superintendent and assistant superintendent are the best I have seen in years. In the short time they have been at Herculaneum High School, things have changed dramatically. Their chief concern is the welfare of the students, and it shows. They care about and know how to relate to the students. They have earned the respect of the students by respecting the students themselves.

We also have some excellent teachers who give a great deal of their personal time to the different organizations within the school. The most recent addition to these organizations is "Angels Among Us". If you think there is no hope for this generation, you should see what these students have done. I have seen them in action and can honestly say, these students are awesome.

Before you make your decision on which high school to attend, do some research. The public is not being told the whole truth on the lead issue. This small group of residents would have you believe that Doe Run is responsible for every mental and health problem suffered by the people living in town. I suppose Herculaneum is the only area where genetics is not a factor in health problems.

They would have you believe that the students in our schools are not "living up to their potential". I believe the school's record speaks for itself on that point.

The government agencies that have planned themselves in town have only made the situation worse. It seems they are making up the rules as they go along in order to cover up their past blunders. The information they give to the residents is only a small part of the whole story. And they say nothing that would leave people to believe that Doe Run is actually doing what needs to be done. They will tell you that the air emissions are not in compliance. What they don't tell you is that of the seven monitoring stations, only one has not met standards in the past, and since December, all seven stations ARE in compliance.

They will tell you they have ordered Doe Run to replace soil in yards around town. What they don't say is Doe Run has been doing this voluntarily for 10 years.

Some residents are concerned that their grandchildren, nieces and nephews can't visit them and play outside. I have yet to hear anyone say that the concern is short-term exposure. There is no problem with playing in the yard for a couple of hours once or twice a month.

The streets are another issue. I hear this over and over. As one report stated, "The streets are not safe for children to play in. They are being made to play in grass covered yards." Well, I grew up in the R-7 district, and I know they do things differently out there, but my parents never let me or my brothers and sisters play in the road. As far as I know, there is not a lead problem in R-7. Her reason for confining us to the yard had more to do with not wanting us to be hit by a car. That's the reason I never let my children play in the streets. I wasn't aware that lead was more dangerous than the vehicles.

The slag pile is another issue. People in town are concerned with health risks when children play on it. Slag contains only a small amount of lead and playing on it occasionally is not long-term exposure. What no one from the government agencies will say is that the slag pile is on Doe Run property. That's private property and parents should advise their children that playing on the slag pile is trespassing and that is illegal.

There are just a few examples of how this whole lead issue has been twisted to fit certain personal agendas, but I hope it is sufficient to pique your interest enough to get the whole story. Because of the one-sided media coverage over the past several months, there are many misinformed people out there.

Herculaneum is a nice place to live and raise a family. The school district is among the best in the county. Doe Run has been and will continue to be an asset, not only to the community, but the entire county. If it were not for the lead smelter sitting by the river, there would be NO Herculaneum. The smelter built this town, over 100 years ago, and continues to support it today.

Rhonda Mitchell  
Herculaneum